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PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

Coastal area management in small island developing States

CONTENTS

	Paragraphs	Page
INTRODUCTION	1 - 2	2
I. GENERAL OVERVIEW	3 - 5	2
II. ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT STATE OF THE PROBLEM	6 - 9	3
III. MAIN POLICY ISSUES	10	4
IV. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	11 - 21	5
A. Conclusions	11	5
B. Policy recommendations	12 - 21	5
1. At the national level	12 - 16	5
2. At the international level	17 - 21	6

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INTRODUCTION

1. In their diversity, small island developing States range along a continuum from aggregations of scattered atolls to relatively large land masses. Many atoll States are small, low-lying, sandy and infertile, densely populated and poorly endowed with resources and opportunities for land-based developments. For practical purposes, these small island developing States can be considered coastal areas. 1/ In contrast, larger, higher and volcanically formed small island developing States have more extensive land masses and usually lower population densities. These States, with agriculture and inland water systems similar to those found in continental States, are capable of supporting tropical agriculture and a broader range of economic activities.

2. The special conditions and circumstances that set small island developing States apart from other developing countries are acknowledged explicitly in (a) the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982; (b) the Strategy for Fisheries Management and Development, adopted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in 1994; (c) the FAO Technical Consultation on High Seas Fishing, 1992; (d) the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, 1992; (e) Agenda 21, chapter 17; (f) the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, 1994; and (g) the Chairman's draft agreement for the implementation of the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the conservation and management of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks, 1994.

I. GENERAL OVERVIEW

3. For all small island developing States, the coastal zones are of major social and economic significance for human settlement, subsistence agriculture, fisheries and tourism. However, demands on coastal resources are endangering the long-term supply of these resources. The conservation and sustainable management of resources of coastal areas is known as "coastal area management". This offers the means to balance the competing demands of different users of the same resources and to manage those resources sustainably. Coastal area management is of particular relevance to small island developing States, for which the ocean and coastal areas present opportunities for development, a formidable challenge and a threat in the perspective of yet other emerging environmental problems such as global warming and projected sealevel rise.

4. In recent years, the weakness of conventional sectoral planning in reaching sustainable solutions to conflicting demands for coastal resources has become apparent. In response, multi-sectoral, integrated approaches to coastal area management began to be developed, in developed countries primarily, but also in some developing countries. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development gave support to this process by stressing the importance for small island developing States to develop national policies and management capabilities for the multi-sectoral use of coastal areas.

5. Furthermore, with the entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and the relevance that coastal and marine areas have in meeting essential human needs (food, employment, resources), many countries are assuming a new and expanded role in the management of the coastal and marine resources under national jurisdiction and in arrangements for regional and international cooperation in the area of coastal zone management.

II. ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT STATE OF THE PROBLEM

6. The nature of problems faced by small island developing States with respect to the effective conservation and management of their coastal and marine resources, including fisheries and tourism, are not vitally different from those of other States. However, small island developing States are disadvantaged in that they do not have at their disposal the same range of solutions to these problems as do the larger States. As essentially self-contained ecosystems, problems related to coastal and marine resources management and conservation in small island developing States usually manifest themselves more obviously, more quickly and with greater effect than in larger continental States.

7. Although there are apparent differences between regional groupings of small island developing States, and, indeed, even within regional groupings, it is none the less possible to generalize about a number of characteristics common among these States. These characteristics include, inter alia:

(a) Disproportionately larger ratios of exclusive economic zones of islands to their land areas;

(b) Very high levels of dependence on fish for food;

(c) High-density populations with high rates of growth (in many cases between 2.5 and 3.5 per cent per annum, though markedly lower in the Caribbean region) relative to the carrying-capacity of islands;

(d) High rates of urbanization (as high as 20 per cent per annum in some cases), with inadequate or completely lacking coastal management policies;

(e) Intensive human settlements, with their domestic and productive activities exerting a tremendous pressure on the fragile coastal environment on which they base their development;

(f) High dependence on foreign development assistance;

(g) High levels of urban unemployment (20 per cent and higher of the adult populations) and rural underemployment;

(h) Small, open, dependent and undiversified economies that are extremely vulnerable;

(i) In some cases, substantial rates of outward population migration resulting in critical loss of skills to the economy.

8. All of these problems have obvious and direct bearings on coastal and marine environments, societies and activities in small island developing States.

9. Sectoral approaches to development have failed to deal effectively with the above problems and the situation is becoming more complex with increasing demand on the natural resources of small island developing States and the resulting conflicts in resource allocation and use. This threatening situation has led to an increasing interest, on the part of the authorities in small island States, in the development of more appropriate schemes for the management of their coastal areas and resources.

III. MAIN POLICY ISSUES

10. Chapter 17 of Agenda 21 has identified two critical areas for the implementation of programmes in relation to coastal area management and human settlements, namely, integrated management and sustainable development of coastal and marine areas, including exclusive economic zones, and the sustainable development of small islands. Priority issues to be tackled in the formulation of policies and strategies for the sustainable development of human settlements in coastal areas and small islands include, inter alia:

(a) Integration of human settlements planning and management considerations into the overall sustainable management of social and economic development in coastal areas;

(b) Formulation and application of sustainable land-use policies;

(c) Development and application of information systems (data, indicators etc.) to support assessments (such as environmental impact assessments) and decision-making on settlements planning and management;

(d) Improvement of shelter and infrastructure in coastal human settlements;

(e) Development and application of appropriate legislative and institutional arrangements for the management of human settlements in coastal areas;

(f) Introduction of natural disaster mitigation and environmental criteria into the planning and management of coastal human settlements;

(g) Development and implementation of appropriate regulatory measures and institutional mechanisms for the reduction, prevention, control and monitoring of pollution in coastal areas, including the safe and efficient management of toxic and hazardous wastes, solid and liquid wastes and the proper management of waste disposal sites.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusions

11. On the basis of the above considerations, and reviewing current and planned activities, as well as the efforts being undertaken at the national and international levels in coastal area management, particularly in small island States, the following general conclusions can be reached and relevant policy recommendations made:

(a) The understanding and appreciation of the value of integrated coastal area management (ICAM) by policy makers in small island developing States is a critical matter and should be promoted and pursued effectively;

(b) The concept of coastal area management has to be developed in the context of sustainable development. However, developing the concept and disseminating information on its application would need priority attention. The development of a dual approach may be necessary, further raising awareness among policymakers about the benefits of ICAM for small island developing States, while building capacity to apply ICAM in practice (strengthening national educational and training mechanisms is considered a matter of priority in the implementation of effective solutions);

(c) Most of the efforts in integrated coastal area management, though technically innovative, and in various cases successful at the local level (generally associated with small geographic areas and/or a limited range of activities), have evolved in isolation from the mainstream of the national development process and have not been effectively integrated into national development planning. Furthermore, such efforts have not attracted a substantial commitment of funds, all of which limitations have made these undertakings not as effective as they could be in the medium or long term;

(d) The development and implementation of effective coastal area management strategies of small island developing States for strengthening national education and training mechanisms should be considered as a matter of priority in order to facilitate the flow of information on sustainable development issues, enhance public awareness and encourage participation in the implementation of effective solutions. A concerted effort on the part of both national and international organizations is therefore required.

B. Policy recommendations

1. At the national level

12. An integrated management of coastal areas should be developed by all small island developing States. This is an essential prerequisite for sustainable development, as it has been learned from experience that policies based on sectoral approaches fail to take into account the overall impact of coastal development on resources.

13. In developing national coastal area management strategies and plans, a lead agency, authority or ministry, should be appointed by the Government of each small island developing State to be in charge of integrated coastal and marine areas management and to ensure that all steps are carried out with the participation of all parties to be involved, including the private sector and indigenous people. Mechanisms for institutional coordination should also be established.

14. Coordination between sectors will be easier if line ministries and users of natural resources recognize their respective roles in the integrated coastal area management process and the impact of their activities on resource users in the sector itself and in other sectors. They must also have the capacity to monitor and assess the effect of the activities of other sectors on them.

15. Though of limited extent, the ecologies of small island States are complex and varied. Detailed analysis of ecological conditions is therefore required to provide an adequate form of integration and define improved multiple use of the natural resources at the national level, in each small island developing State.

16. Increasingly, in recent years, it is being understood that the search for solutions to conflicting demands in coastal areas must involve the various users and administrations concerned. With respect to land tenure, historically, small islands have featured hierarchies of landownership rights from which social status is derived. Environmental regulations limiting land use and controlling access to natural resources have been challenged by landowners who interpret any attempt to limit land rights as a challenge to their social status. The involvement and support of traditional leaders in introducing sustainable development policies and practices is also necessary.

2. At the international level

17. Concerted effort by United Nations agencies, in close association and in partnership with other relevant international, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, should be pursued in order to assist the Governments of small island developing States in the development of their national coastal area management plans.

18. Within the context of integrated coastal area management for small island developing States, the activities planned or under way by international organizations should be implemented in a coordinated and cost-effective manner. These activities should include, but not be limited to, the following priority areas:

(a) Protection and management of marine and coastal areas through integrated coastal areas management, including a number of demonstration or pilot projects in integrated island management in which marine and coastal resource issues are incorporated into the development planning process of selected small island developing States;

(b) Strengthening of information management capabilities through the further development of SIDSNET and possibly the establishment of regional Global

Resource Information Database nodes for small island developing States, provision of technical advisory services and environmental assessments;

(c) Capacity-building for national institutions, in the collation of data and information, development and use of database systems and coastal resource mapping.

19. To assist national line ministries in their tasks of designing and implementing ICAM plans, guidelines for specific sub-sectors such as tourism, fisheries, agriculture and forestry, which constitute the main users of resources in the coastal areas of small island developing States, should be further developed. In this respect, use should be made of the experience gained by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in developing its guidelines for the integrated management of coastal and marine areas for the Mediterranean Basin and by FAO on the integration of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in integrated coastal area management. Such guidelines can be of assistance to planners and users in these subsectors.

20. The above tasks require coordinated efforts from national and international organizations, and greater inter-agency cooperation within the United Nations system is needed to better harness existing capabilities.

21. Intersectoral cooperation and coordination is needed to address current human resource development needs for small island developing States. The magnitude of such a task, in both its quantitative and qualitative aspects, calls for further strengthening and formally establishing effective communications networks between the United Nations and other organizations working in the area of human resource development. Cooperation among developing countries and between developed and developing countries is essential in order to share experiences, information, materials and personnel.

Notes

1/ The report of the Secretary-General on the protection of the oceans, all kinds of seas, including enclosed and semi-enclosed seas, and coastal areas and the protection, rational use and development of their living resources (E/CN.17/1996/3) uses the Agenda 21 terminology "coastal area". The same terminology is used here for the sake of consistency and to avoid confusion. The terminology used in the Barbados Programme of Action is "coastal zone".